these offices and then forwarded to the Passport Office who will issue the passports. The Scheme is already operational at 31 designated Speed Post Centres in various parts of the country.

Passport Office at Siliguri

1901. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government feel the necessity of opening a Passport Office at Siliguri, West Bengal; and

(b) if so, by when such office is going to be opened?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) No Sir. There is already a Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC) at Siliguri in West Bengal. Opening of new Passport Office is governed by certain criteria such as the location of existing offices and volume of applications from a particular region. Besides, as per the recommendations of the Standing Committee of Parliament on the MEA, there should be at least 50,000 applications for passport per year from an area where a new Passport Office is to be opened. This criterion is not met for the 6 districts of North Bengal which are being served by the PACC at Siliguri. However, steps are being taken to decentralise the collection of passport applications at the district level through the District Authorities.

(b) Does not arise.

Casual workers employed in Passport Offices

1902. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are hundreds of casual workers employed in different Passport Offices in the country;

(b) if so, whether these casual employees are performing the jobs of perennial nature;

(c) if so, whether, the question of security in processing the passports may be compromised;